

# Salem, CT ~ 2009 Town-Wide Survey ~ Executive Summary

## Survey Background

The townspeople of Salem participated in a town-wide survey from November 11, 2009, through December 31, 2009. The survey was a collaborative effort by representatives from the Plan of Conservation and Development Committee (POCD), Vision Committee and the Economic Development Commission (EDC).

The purpose of the survey was to obtain the thoughts of the townspeople for input into developing the town vision, updating the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), and for Economic Development planning.

There were 403 taxpayers and voters who took the survey, (366 online, 37 paper), 98% of whom reside in Salem.

The margin of error is +/- 5% at the 95% confidence level.

## Our Community Character

The townspeople who participated in the survey found the following characteristics define our character (questions C1, C2):

- Rural characteristics (92%),
- Volunteerism (80%),
- Participation in town affairs (78%),
- Sense of community (81%), and
- History (81%).

Question C3 asked for free-form comments about our community character, *"If there are other elements that you feel contribute to Salem's distinctive community character and that Salem should cultivate, please describe."*

- There were 142 comments that identified the following elements in response to question C3:
  - 20 – Open Space
  - 16 – Small size/location of town
  - 14 – Agriculture - present and past
  - 12 – Quality of school/school community
  - 10 – Small/local business - to be cultivated for convenience and/or tax revenue
  - 9 – Historic buildings or other historic features
  - 9 – Rural character (e.g., Town Center buildings, stone walls)

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- 8 – Lack of commercial footprint
- 7 – Four Corners - needs to be improved
- 7 – Natural resources (8-Mile River, forests, fields, clean air, dark skies)
- 7 – The people who live here (caring/friendly)
- 7 – Recreational activities
- 6 – Participation in town events (e.g., Apple Festival)
- 10 - Other (miscellaneous)

"Green" Focus: 79% of respondents believe it is important to have a green focus. Elements considered most important to achieve that focus included (questions C4, C5):

- Recycling (92%),
- Energy efficient municipal facilities (84%)
- Renewable energy sources (79%)

Question C6 asked people for free-form comments on what a "Green" focus means to them, *"Please describe other elements not included above that are necessary for Salem to have a 'green' focus."*

- There were 109 comments that identified the following elements:
  - 17 – Land preservation/limited development
  - 16 – Only "go green" where it makes sense financially/provides a payoff
  - 14 – Recycling (expanded categories, more locations, free pick-up)
  - 9 – Incentives for energy savings
  - 8 – Sustainable energy sources - Town
  - 7 – Walkable/bikeable paths
  - 6 – Education/awareness
  - 5 – Refuse disposal (free pick-up, better enforcement)
  - 4 – Sustainable energy sources - Residential
  - 4 – Pesticide/herbicide avoidance
  - 3 – Energy conservation - Town Facilities
  - 3 – Regulations encouraging "green" focus
  - 3 – Sustainable food sources/farming practices
  - 3 – Complete Rte 11
  - 7 - Other (miscellaneous)

## Finance and Education

The majority of respondents said we should neither decrease nor increase our budget spending (questions FE1, FE3):

- Maintain services by maintaining general budget: 77%
- Maintain capital expenditures by maintaining the budget: 73%

Question FE2 asked for freeform suggestions, *"If you think Salem can increase services without increasing the budget, please indicate how."*

- There were 64 comments that suggested the following strategies:
  - 9 – Regionalize selective services
  - 8 – Increase work process efficiencies
  - 8 – Reduce school administrative costs
  - 8 – Increase volunteerism/donations
  - 6 – Eliminate/reduce selective services
  - 4 – Increase economic development
  - 4 – Pursue grants
  - 4 – Not possible!
  - 3 – Reduce salaries
  - 3 – Consolidate Fire Departments
  - 2 – Reduce Town energy costs
  - 5 - Other (miscellaneous)

Of respondents who felt they knew enough to respond, the majority said they are satisfied with the quality of education in the Elementary School (80%), Middle School (78%), and High School (84%). They also said we should maintain our current quality of education by maintaining the budget (questions FE5, F6).

- Maintain quality of education by maintaining the elementary school education budget (68%)
- Maintain quality of education by maintaining the middle school education budget (66%)

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Question FE7 asked, "If you think the quality of education can be increased without increasing the budget, please indicate how."

- There were 105 comments that recommended the following:
  - 32 – Reduce administration /administrators' salaries
  - 10 – More volunteerism
  - 9 – Improve teacher performance (eliminate under-performers, eliminate tenure, improve hiring/training process)
  - 5 – Increase class size
  - 4 – Reduce/eliminate duplicative staff
  - 3 – Reduce teachers' salaries/reneegotiate contracts
  - 2 - Regionalize
  - 2 - Offer early retirement
  - 2 - Charge for supplies/sports/fields trips
  - 20 - Other (miscellaneous)
- Additionally, 16 disagreed with the premise that the town can't increase/maintain quality while reducing the budget.

### Government and Infrastructure

Over half of respondents felt all services were important. The most important services were: fire services (91%), road maintenance 90%), ambulance/EMT (89%), snow removal (86%), police (86%), Middle/Elementary schools (86%), and the library (82%) (question GIFS3).

Of people who believed they knew enough to comment, the majority were satisfied with most services. They were most satisfied with services provided by the library (87%), fire services (86%), high school (84%), snow removal (81%), and ambulance/EMT (81%) (question GIFS4).

Over half of respondents did not know enough to comment on the quality of youth services (excluding recreation), senior services, health services and visiting nurse (question GIFS4).

### Recreation

Over a third (36%) of respondents felt it is a priority or high priority to develop multi-user trails to connect different areas of town, and to add bike lanes to existing, designated roads (question R1).

Of those who knew enough to respond, nearly half (47%) believe it is important to increase the number of programs available for 14 – 20 year olds, and slightly fewer (43%) believe it is important to increase the number of programs available to younger children (K – 13 years old (Question R4).

Respondents had an opportunity to provide additional thoughts in question R3, "Please describe any other high priority recreational facilities or activities you would like to see Salem provide."

- 84 comments offered the following suggestions:
  - 15 – Trails: hiking/biking
  - 12 – Exercise programs (yoga, fitness, weight)
  - 12 – Swimming (pool, public access to lake)
  - 10 – Community Center
  - 5 – Park
  - 5 – None – enough already!
  - 3 – Dance programs
  - 3 – Open space for events (e.g., Farmers Market)
  - 19 – Other (miscellaneous)

Gadbois Property: Over half of respondents felt the Gadbois property should be used for trails, open-air public events such as festivals, open space, and farmers markets (question R5).

Question R6 asked for freeform responses to, "What other purpose not included above do you think Salem should use the Gadbois property for?"

- The 91 freeform comments identified the following uses:
  - 26 – Recreation:
    - Walking/fitness trails
    - Swimming
    - Cross county skiing

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- Multi-purpose
- Athletic fields
- Dog park
- Horse park
- 22 – Revenue stream
- 6 – Open air events (fairs, tag sales)
- 5 – Housing (Senior, ARD)
- 5 – Hunting
- 4 – Agriculture
- 3 – No hunting
- 3 – Community Center
- 3 – Village Center
- 14 – Other (miscellaneous)

### Economic Development

The majority of respondents (85%) said it is important to expand our commercial tax base, presuming compatibility with our community (question ED2).

To achieve this, over half felt many types of businesses could be encouraged in Salem, primarily family restaurants, businesses with a green focus, a grocer, a drug store, and agriculture (question ED4).

Question ED5 gave respondents the opportunity to provide freeform responses to the following question, "Which other types of business should be encouraged or discouraged?"

- 84 Comments encouraged the following:
  - 8 – Offices - professional
  - 6 – Entertainment (movie house or theatre)
  - 6 – Grocery store (mainly specialty)
  - 6 – Retail shops - specialty/destination
  - 5 – Coffee shops/cafe
  - 5 – Recreation/tourism focus
  - 3 -- Distribution/warehousing
  - 3 -- Drugstore
  - 3 – Technology focus
  - 3 – Equestrian
  - 3 – Hunting lodge/preserve
  - 3 – Fast Food
  - 3 – Hospitality (B&B, small hotel)
  - 27 – Other (miscellaneous)

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- 22 Comments discouraged the following:
  - 9 – Alcohol/tobacco/tattoos/adult entertainment
  - 5 – Anything that generated pollution (noise, traffic, air/water pollution)
  - 3 – Box stores
  - 5 – Other (miscellaneous)
- In addition, 9 comments stated that 4 Corners needed to be improved/cleaned up, and 2 expressed disagreement with the premise that more business could reduce residential taxes.

If we do not expand our commercial tax base, fewer than a third (28%) said it is acceptable to reduce services and only 24% said it would be acceptable to raise taxes at a rate required to support town expenses (question ED 6).

Question ED7 asked for ideas to raise revenue, *“If you indicated it would be acceptable to pursue other methods of raising revenue, please describe those methods.”*

- There were 88 comments that proposed the following methods:
  - 8 – Sell Town Resources
  - 8 – Reduce cost (e.g., limit residential development)
  - 8 – Charge to use town assets
  - 6 – More business in general
  - 4 – Seek state resource support
  - 4 – Seek professional help

If we do expand our commercial tax base, 72% of respondents said it would be acceptable to adopt design regulations to create a visually attractive area for businesses (question ED 8).

Also, over half of respondents said it would be acceptable to provide short-term tax incentives (64%), obtain professional assistance to market Salem to attract targeted businesses (61%), and revise zoning to allow more commercial use and mixed use (62%) (question ED8).

Question ED9 asked, *“If the town does expand its commercial base, what other actions not mentioned above would be acceptable or unacceptable to you?”*

- There were 64 comments that suggested the following:
  - 6 – Ensure visual appeal
  - 5 – More cooperative P&Z
  - 5 – Improve/clean up 4 Corners
  - 4 – Enforce regulations (e.g., signs)
  - 4 – No development/preserve open space
  - 3 – Develop business around Rte 11
  - 3 – Prevent tax cut incentive risk (i.e., business leaves after tax incentive is over)
  - 3 – Make it difficult for less desirable businesses to come to Salem
  - 31 – Other (miscellaneous)

### Housing

Only 31% of respondents said we should increase the choice of housing in our town (e.g., mixed income, multi-family) (question H2).

However, if Salem were to increase the choice of housing available, the top two types of housing we should encourage would be Senior Housing (60%), Age-Restricted housing (56%) (question H3).

### Village Center

Over half of respondents, 60%, believe it is important to have a village center, while 27% believe it is not important. Others said they have no opinion or were neutral on this topic. (Question VC1)

The majority of respondents (82%) said it is acceptable to adopt building appearance standards, as well as adopt regulations that specify permitted uses within the Village Center district (80%) (question VC4).

Over two thirds of respondents (69%) said it would be acceptable to allow selective businesses to operate in areas currently designated as residential only (question VC4).

Respondents were able to provide freeform comments in question VC3, *“What other elements not mentioned above should be part of it?”*

- 75 comments suggested the following elements:
  - 6 – Pedestrian/bicycle access (for safety/convenience)
  - 6 – Offices - professional!
  - 5 – Drugstore
  - 4 – Grocery store
  - 3 – Parking
  - 3 – Recreation (indoor)
  - 3 – Retail shops emphasizing convenience/practical shopping
  - 28 – Other (miscellaneous)
- Additionally, 5 comments stressed that there should be no cost to townspeople; 4 stated that 4 Corners needed to be improved/cleaned up, 4 disagreed with proposed location on Rte 85 between Rattlesnake Ledge and Music Vale Road, and 3 did not feel that a New England Village look was important.

### Natural Resources

The majority of townspeople believe it is important to protect our natural resources (77% - 92% depending on the resource) (question NR2).

Almost two thirds of respondents (64%) said it would be acceptable to amend zoning regulations to further protect our natural resources during the site planning and subdivision process, while 16% said this would be unacceptable (question NR2).

Respondents had the opportunity to provide freeform comments in question NR4, *“In acting to preserve Salem's natural resources, what other actions not mentioned above would be acceptable to you to?”*

- 46 comments suggested the following actions:
  - 4 – Fund open space (have town buy land, charge developers a per lot fee)
  - 3 – Educate
  - 3 – Complete Rte 11
  - 2 – Benchmark best practices
  - 2 – Cluster/conservation design
  - 2 – Limit commercial development
  - 21 – Other

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- 9 responses stressed the need to balance any preservation efforts with the need for economic development, and spoke against adding new regulations, or protecting any more land.

### Historic and Archeological Resources

At least half of respondents believe it is important to preserve Historic and Archeological resources, with the most people believing it is important to protect ancient cemeteries (81%), buildings on the historic register (78%), scenic roads (75%), and visible stone walls (74%) (question HAR2).

Over half of respondents (59%) said it would be acceptable to limit activity near these resources to protect them (question HAR 3).

### Regionalism

Of various areas where we could partner with nearby towns, respondents felt the following were the most important: Police (85%), High School (85%), Emergency medical Services (84%), and Fire protection (84%) (question RE1).

Over two thirds of respondents said they would agree to partner with another town, depending on the money saved (69%) and amount of control we would share (67%) (question RE2).

### Other

Of people who moved to Salem, 59% moved here because of the rural character, 41% said it was because of the local beauty, and 34% said it was because of the school system (question OTH1).

We asked for other reasons people moved to Salem in question OTH1, "Other, please specify [Why did you move to Salem?]"

- 181 comments identified the following reasons:
  - 33 – Family (born here, family here, married Salem resident)
  - 30 – Job/job opportunities (proximity to)
  - 24 – House/property we liked
  - 23 – House/property was affordable
  - 19 – Location (central, good access)
  - 15 – Natural resources/rural character (Lakes, no pollution or sprawl)
  - 12 – School system (primarily High School)
  - 9 – Amount of land available/lot size
  - 6 – Town/community/area we liked
  - 10 – Other (miscellaneous)

Over half of respondents said they do not plan to leave (54%). The top three reasons for staying are: rural character (72%), beauty of the area (65%), people and sense of community (49%) (question OTH2).

We asked for other reasons people are staying in Salem in question OTH5, "Other, please specify reason [Why are you staying in Salem?]"

- 68 comments identified the following reasons:
  - 18 – Family/roots are here
  - 15 – Like our home/property; feel like we belong here
  - 9 – Location (convenient, central access to recreation/services)
  - 8 – Natural Resources (Gardner Lake, wildlife, night sky)
  - 7 – Job is here
  - 11 – Other (miscellaneous reasons)

Only 16% said they plan to leave. The top reason for leaving is that taxes are increasing too fast (56%), the next most common reason was that there are not enough local shopping and other conveniences (28%).

Respondents had the opportunity to provide additional reasons they plan to leave. Following are their responses to question OTH4, "Other, please specify reason [If you plan to leave Salem, why are you leaving]"

- 38 comments identified the following reasons:
  - 12 – Too expensive (local/state taxes, cost of living)
  - 7 – Lack of conveniences/necessities
  - 4 – Job opportunities/transfer
  - 3 – Climate
  - 2 – Commercial development taking over
  - 2 – Too much work to maintain property
  - 8 – Other (miscellaneous reasons)

Fewer than one third of respondents currently have a child in the Salem school system, elementary, middle, or high school (29%), while about half (52%) have had a child in the Salem school system (question DE4 and DE5).

### Survey Respondent Demographics

Age group	Count (% of total)
No age given	34 (8.3%)
< 34 yrs old	40 (9.9%)
35 - 44	70 (17.4%)
45 - 54	91 (22.6%)
55 - 64	100 (24.8%)
65 - 74	55 (13.6%)
75 - 88	13 (3.2%)
Total	403 (100%)